



## **A MODEST FARMER**

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### **How to impress your MP – ambush him**

Fred and his friends asked me last week for inside information as to how they should handle their member of Parliament, to make him face up to the tariff issue and to the damage that tariffs are doing to farmers.

In other words, they want me to tell them how to twist politicians' ears in the same way as we used to twist the ear of a rough horse so that it would stand quietly and not get away.

Let's assume that your member has accepted an invitation from the branch of your political party to be the guest speaker on tariffs at the annual meeting.

It is no good going for his ear as soon as he gets inside the hall. After all, he may be a dedicated and knowledgeable low tariff man who knows far more about the subject than you do.

There are not many of these about, but this is all the more reason why you should cherish them.

Or he may be a high tariff man or simply one who cannot make up his mind.

Most of the members who represent country constituencies seem to be in the latter category.

When the annual meeting starts, make sure you do all you can to help the chairman get quickly through the formalities so that they do not exhaust the time and patience available for the main part of the meeting.

I remember that at one such meeting there were some in the audience that I knew wanted to have a piece of me for some reason.

I listened to the chairman flog the unwilling meeting along, trying to get the formal part over so that my critics could get at me.

But all I had to do was to question the propriety of some action and they argued over this bone for half an hour, so that by the time the annual meeting part was finished it was time to go home.

So make sure you help the chairman by quickly nominating people for positions. You yourself may even end up as secretary and, if so, it serves you right.

When the formal proceedings are finished, and the member is introduced, don't go for his ear straight away. As I said before, he may be a low tariff advocate and such treatment would upset him.

But let's assume that he is one of the undecided members who can't make up his mind or perhaps he wants to have a bit both ways or is determined to keep in the good graces of the Prime Minister.

Even if he is one of these, still don't rag his ear just yet — if you do, the audience will start to feel sorry for him.

So clap like blazes when he is introduced and "hear, hear" loudly if he says something nice which he is sure to do, he being a member of Parliament.

Wait your chance until question time comes round.

Then it is most important that you do not spoil things by asking long and confused questions.

Most of these are asked in order to impress the audience as to how much the questioner knows, not to acquire information.

If you ask a complicated question, a clever member will beat about that bush for half an hour or so.

He will know that there is nothing in the bush, but that won't worry him; he will only be interested in the time ticking away.

Members of Parliament may be a bit simple, but they get lessons each question time from ministers on how to evade answering questions they find awkward.

So have your gang armed with a series of short, snappy questions such as: "Is it a fact tariffs are subsidies paid, in the end, by exporters?"

Or another question could be: "Is it a fact that the tariff burden weighs about \$4,000 million, with about half of this paid by farmers?"

I always used to hate questions that began with "is it a fact?" They were usually asked by strong, silent, raw-boned people and were difficult to evade.

It is when the member starts answering simple questions that you will find if he is for you or against you. If the latter, then you must go for his ear immediately.

And he will leave you for dead unless you hang on. When he starts to shuffle sideways, appeal loudly to the chairman.

And train up some of your supporters to take points of order or to interject rudely if the speaker starts to dodge the issue.

Such behaviour will be frowned on by sections of the audience, but this is the only way you will make a smart politician face up to an issue he wants to avoid.

Get a good grip of his ear, twist it tight and hang on. Once the beggar's feet start to go, you will never see which way he went.

And get the chairman to ask you to move the vote of thanks.

Then you can get in a few nasty and shrewd blows when the member isn't looking and can't reply.

This may not be a nice way to behave, but the tariff situation is too serious to worry about being nice.